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ABSTRACT

The case study of an all-male Catholic college preparatory school illustrates that, although the school appears to be a model school, African American students do not feel connected to the school community or culture, and many experience alienation, frustration, and racial prejudice at the school. Initial interview questions were pretested with 10 students, and then surveys of 66 members of the larger student population and 10 faculty members were conducted. The school enrolled 1,355 students at the start of the study, only 35 of whom were African American. Thirteen African American students participated in the study. The experience of the African American students was very different than that of other students. None spoke enthusiastically about belonging to the school community, a finding in contrast with those regarding White, Asian, and American Indian students. None of the African American students was as enthusiastic about the school in general as the majority of students. None thought that the curriculum was reflective of cultural diversity, and most talked about feeling isolated at the school and experiencing racial discrimination. The African American Student Union did play a significant role in the school 'ive- of the African Americans. Findings indicate that ethnicity is an important social construct for ethnic and cultural minority students at the school. (Contains 5 tables and 19 references.) (SLD)

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Sociocultural Factors Affecting School Culture for African American Students: A Case Study

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INTRODUCTION

In 1985 I became codirector of a support program for Latino students at St. Peter Claver College Preparatory[1] and worked for three years with a small (7%) but significant population of Latino students and their families. The purpose of the program was to provide spiritual, emotional, and academic support for interested Latino students. Approximately 40 students (out of about 90 total Latino students) joined the program. I left the school in 1988, and one year later I conducted an evaluation of the program (Martin, 1990a, 1990b; 1995/1996) as it existed then. Among the findings was the reality that apart from the support program, the school was not aware of the *special needs*[2] of some of these Latino students (approx. 25% of the Latino students in the support program (n = 10) displayed special needs).

While the 1989 study provided a basis for the school's subsequent shift to a concern for cultural diversity, it raised the question about how students of color related to the school culture. I continued working with the school from 1989 through 1995, as a participant observer, giving a faculty in-service with a colleague (Martin & Artiga, 1994), meeting with each individual department, advising the administration, and meeting with individual students and student

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[1]*St. Peter Claver College Preparatory School* is a pseudonym for an all-male, Catholic, Jesuit-run college preparatory school located in the Western United States. All names used in this study are pseudonyms.

[2]The term *special needs* was used by Martin (1990a) to refer to those essential needs of ethnic and cultural minority students that are not typically observed by school teachers and administrators, which may affect the students' chances of success. Examples of these needs are: the need for adequate food and other basic necessities, the need for a supportive and encouraging environment in which to study, the need to feel comfortable and accepted in the school culture, and the need for appropriate role models.

groups. Thus, with the assistance of a team of colleagues, I expanded the original 1989 study, which only focused on Latino students, to include *all* ethnic and cultural minority students at the school. As the study progressed, a clear pattern emerged that the experiences and perspectives of the African American students as a group were notably different than the other students in the study. At this point, I increased the number of African American students interviewed, and made their concerns and situation in the school a major focus of the study. The results indicated that although St. Peter Claver appeared to be a model school, the African American students did not feel connected to the school community or culture, and many of them experienced alienation, frustration, prejudice and racism at the school.

METHODOLOGY

The study utilized a process for generating *grounded theory* as discussed by Bernard (1994), Patton (1987, 1990), Strauss & Corbin (1990), and Woods (1992). Based on participant observation data and the 1989 study (Martin, 1990a), initial interview questions were designed, pretested with 10 students, and later administered to the rest of the applicants with greater clarity and focus. Students who participated in the pretest were excluded from the final interview sample.

After an initial analysis of the student interviews, I conducted a survey of the larger population of students and faculty. Interview questions for the faculty were formulated after an initial analysis of all the above data. The grounded theory research design called for a general content and pattern analysis of the data without specifying the specific basis of analysis. Only

after the data were collected and processed did the final basis for content and pattern data analysis emerge, as reported in Table 5.

The Setting

St. Peter Claver College Preparatory was founded in 1851 by the Jesuit order as the oldest school for boys in its state and one of 15 Jesuit secondary institutions in the Western United States. It is located in an urban center; the local city population was close to 800,000 persons in the 1990 census. St. Peter Claver attracts students from four counties and many students commute more than 30 minutes to the school. The ethnic demographics for the local county are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Local County Population, 1990 Census

	African American	Asian/Pacific Islander	Hispanic	White
%	4.0	17.0	21.0	58.0

Source: 1990 Census

St. Peter Claver is a college preparatory school that enrolled 1355 students in Fall 1994. Of these 65.83% (n = 892) are Catholic and 34.17% (n = 463) are non-Catholic. The ethnic and religious breakdown of the students by group is given in Table 2, and faculty in Table 3.

Table 2: Student Enrollment Data Summary, September 1994

		Hispanic		White		Black		Filipino		Chinese		Japanese		Korean		Vietnamese		Amer. Indian		Other non-White	
Grade	Total	C	NC	C	NC	C	NC	C	NC	C	NC	C	NC	C	NC	C	NC	C	NC	C	NC
9	356	41	2	142	51	5	10	34	1	9	18	0	8	2	3	4	3	1	2	3	17
10	346	42	5	138	68	0	7	21	0	7	15	1	6	1	1	2	2	1	5	7	17
11	331	31	3	132	66	4	5	21	1	4	18	1	4	1	1	7	3	3	0	12	14
12	322	28	4	147	63	2	2	19	0	8	14	0	4	0	6	5	2	1	0	5	12
Total	1355	142	14	559	11	11	24	95	2	28	65	2	22	4	11	18	10	6	7	27	60
Total No.		156		807		35		97		93		24		15		28		13		87	
Total %		11.51%		59.56%		2.58%		7.16%		6.86%		1.77%		1.11%		2.06%		0.96%		6.42%	

Source: School Records

Table 3: Faculty Data Summary, September 1994

	Hispanic		White		Black		Filipino		Chinese		Japanese		Korean		Vietnamese		Amer. Indian		Other non-White	
Faculty	C	NC	C	NC	C	NC	C	NC	C	NC	C	NC	C	NC	C	NC	C	NC	C	NC
Religious	2		18						1											
Lay	6		54	10		1			1											
Total	8		72	10		1			2											
Total No.	8		82		1		0		2		0		0		0		0		0	
Total %	8.60%		89.31%		1.07%		0%		2.15%		0%		0%		0%		0%		0%	

Source: School Records

Note: C = Catholic; NC = Non Catholic; Other non-White includes mostly Indian and Middle Eastern

During 1994-1995 tuition at St. Peter Claver was $4,700; 217 students were awarded full and partial scholarships. Approximately 16% of the students receive some form of financial assistance amounting to $496,000. The breakdown of students receiving financial aid by ethnic group is given in Table 4:

Table 4: Students Receiving Financial Aid by Ethnicity, 1994-1995

Ethnic Group	%
Black	7.0
Hispanic	24.0
Filipino	5.0
Japanese	4.0
Korean	1.0
Vietnamese	4.0
Native American	1.0
Other Minority	3.0
Caucasian	49.0

Source: School Records

The Participants

I conducted in-depth interviews at St. Peter Claver with 66 students during May and June 1994, and with 10 faculty during a period from September 1994 to January 1995. The descriptive data of the participants were all self-reported data.

The African American participants (n = 13) were all U.S. born and monolingual English speakers. Five students in this group were seniors, three each were juniors and sophomores and two were freshmen. Six of the African American students identified their religion as Baptist, three as Catholic, one each as Christian and declined to state, and two as no religion.

Data Analysis

The primary method of analysis for the interview data was thematic content and pattern analysis as described by Miles & Huberman (1994) and Patton (1987, 1990). The analyzation of the student interview data followed open-coding procedures of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing and categorizing data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p.61). The video

tapes of the entire data set were reexamined and 13 initial categories emerged from the data. I formulated these categories into a matrix for further evaluation. After receiving the feedback from two colleagues I formulated a matrix with five main categories that seemed to identify best the major issues regarding ethnicity and cultural diversity and that seemed the most valid since they emerged directly from the interviews. They are presented in Table 5. Next, I reviewed all of the interview transcriptions in light of the five categories and their properties, and recorded exemplars of the patterns and categories.

Table 5: Categories and Properties from Student Interviews

Category Title	Description of Category	Properties Related to Category
Community	The way the individual members of the school collectively create and participate in a communal experience and the meaning given to that experience	Campus ministry program, retreats, liturgies, community service, school assemblies, satisfaction rate, relationship with the faculty, participation in school activities
Cultural Mismatch	The way certain individual members of the school do not connect with the school and experience discontinuity between their home communities and the school community	Connection between students' home culture and the school culture, differences in student's backgrounds and relationship to the dominant majority
Ethnic and Cultural Diversity	The way the school and the students respond to differences between and among groups, both within the school and the larger society	Curricular diversity, cultural and ethnic diversity of faculty and students, support services and response to diversity over time
Ethnic and Cultural Clubs	The way the school community responds to ethnicity, ethnic differences and the phenomenon and role of ethnic and cultural clubs	The emergence and significance of ethnic and cultural clubs, the flexibility in membership and the permeability of boundaries in ethnic clubs, the backlash by White students and faculty, the educational purpose of the ethnic and cultural clubs, the role of moderator
Racism/Prejudice	The way students experience racism and prejudice at the school	Different experience of racism and prejudice, different perceptions about how other students experience racism and prejudice

FINDINGS

Community

In its school philosophy and admissions materials St. Peter Claver presents itself as a school with a unique educational mission: preparing other-centered students who possess the intellectual and emotional ability to be agents for social change. The school has adopted the universal Jesuit motto, "Men for Others," as its school motto. The notion of community is central to the school philosophy and mission. The data suggest, however, that there are differences in the experience of community between groups.

Differences in Experience of Community

The interview data suggest that the experience of African American students is very different from all other students. Asian, Indian and White students described the St. Peter Claver community in enthusiastic terms. In contrast, none of the African American students spoke enthusiastically about belonging to the school community. Eight students said they did not feel there was a school community, 3 students said there was a community only at certain times and there were limited times that they felt a part of it, and 2 students said that there was a community but it was only open to "insiders," and getting on the inside was hard.

One White student, for example, said that the community at St. Peter Claver was very close-knit, that everyone in the school was a part of it, and that the Jesuits and their philosophy are what held the community together. In comparison, an African American senior who was very involved in the school and student government experienced a variance in the times he felt

connected to the school community. He said many African Americans were alienated by the school community:

> I think it's harder for them [African American students] to like a place like St. Peter Claver when that's the case when they feel so alienated and so—not like they're excluded but just like they don't—that it's just not their place. I don't think that the Black students graduating with me this year think of St. Peter Claver as, you know, "our place," or a place that would claim us as it's own. . . . I think that a lot of the minority students don't feel part of the St. Peter Claver community. When they see the teachers, when they see the administrators, when they see the alumni and the trustees. They see, you know, the priests. I mean it's a Jesuit school and, I mean, I've met one Black Jesuit and that was a surprise 'cause I didn't know there were any, and that's Jesuit history, Jesuit tradition, Jesuit education. And how does that relate to my life? I don't know, I think that that's a pretty common experience . . .

And another African American senior who played two varsity sports:

> Compared to before there's been a lot of Black people graduating. I don't see too many of them coming back and I'm not sure that I would want to come back either. . . . So, it's a St. Peter Claver community. Whether it's really accessible to everyone, I don't know. It's a funny situation.

One African American sophomore involved in two campus clubs said:

> I think there's some [students on the] inside and some [on the] outside. We always say that we're a community, but there's still a lot of people who stay outside, who don't like St. Peter Claver and don't like being here but they're forced to be here. Sometimes, I think some of the phrases they use like "St. Peter Claver Community," or "men for others," I think are a little phony because a lot of the kids here would cheat, would do anything for themselves and not for others. So, we are a community of a whole bunch of people who are around each other a lot but I don't know if we act as a community, helping each other, keeping each other up.

Satisfaction Rate

Another pattern that I observed was the difference in the satisfaction rate with the school between African American students and all other students. None of the African American

students was as unreservedly enthusiastic about the school as the non-African American students. Six students said they would pick the school again but also expressed some reservations about their satisfaction rate. Five students said they were not sure if they would pick the school again. One student said he definitely wished he had gone somewhere else. The following quotation from a senior student seems to capture the common experience:

> It's mixed feelings. As far as the educational thing, it's excellent. I mean it's cool and all. As far as the social part, it's—I don't know. It was like everybody had their own little click and everybody says St. Peter Claver's supposed to be culturally diverse, this and that. I guess everybody on the outside was like yeah, "Hi," this and that, but it didn't seem like it was sincere too much.

When asked if he would send his son to the same school one African American sophomore said he might because of the good academics but, "he probably wouldn't like it."

Cultural Mismatch

I observed a pattern of cultural mismatch which seemed to be most pronounced among African American students. The pattern that emerged from the data was that the ethnic minority students who reported evidence of cultural mismatch shared the following characteristics: (1) they came from home communities and junior high schools where their ethnic group was a majority or where they experienced White people as a minority group, (2) they did not have much experience with White people, (3) their ethnic identification was culturally separatist and they seemed to resist assimilation into the dominate culture. Those ethnic minority students who had experience of being in majority White settings did not report evidence of cultural mismatch.

For example, one African American junior discussed how he felt when he started St. Peter Claver:

> I guess I was shocked. . . . I knew it would be mostly White. I was totally not expecting that. Because in junior high it was mostly Blacks and Mexicans. I wasn't totally shocked but I was shocked a little bit. I thought it would be less than what it was. . . . There are few Blacks on campus. I sometimes feel out of place.

Ethnic and Cultural Diversity

The school experienced a notable change in demographics from the 1980s to 1994 when the White student enrollment went from 88% to 59%. Even with this increase in non-White students, the school seemed to lag in making changes with regards to diversity of the curriculum. The issue of cultural diversity in the St. Peter Claver curriculum was a major theme that most of the students interviewed discussed. The pattern I observed is a difference in the assessment of the curriculum between the White students and the ethnic minority students. All of the White students except one described the curriculum as culturally diverse. The common experience was that the St. Peter Claver curriculum had exposed them to countries, authors and ideas that were very different from their own experience.

Of all the responses regarding the curriculum, however, none were stronger than those of the African American students. Not one African American student described the curriculum as reflective of cultural diversity. This seemed to be a major issue for them and several African American students talked to the English department faculty about the lack of African American authors in the curriculum. Several teachers indicated that adequate books about Black experience existed in the curriculum, such as *Huck Finn*, but this position was not well accepted by the African American students. As one junior student said, "As far as English classes, freshman, sophomore years basically were White authors. As far as books that dealt with Black heritage,

they were written by White authors which kind of concerned me. I wanted a more diverse book."

Another senior said:

> I don't want St. Peter Claver to throw in, you know, token Black authors to pacify us, to get us to shut up. But I think that St. Peter Claver makes a statement about American literature, about world literature, when they don't include African American literature. . . . I mean, I think that there have been really significant influences and things that African American authors have given to American literature that we just totally skipped. The only images we have of Black characters are completely negative and, um, Jim, Jim is the biggest Black character in literature that we studied, in *Huckleberry Finn*. And that's it, and I think that that not only says something about—when we see characters and when we see a lack of authors it's not helping anything. The people who don't understand what it's like to be at St. Peter Claver and be the minority or obviously who are not Black and don't know what it's like to be Black, can't have that perspective, can't even come close to it if they're never exposed to it. And for those people who are Black I think it's just as important, if not more important, that they need it to understand that there are very significant things done by Black authors and history is the same thing.

The predominate feeling of the African Americans regarding the curriculum was summed up by one senior student, "You can't just let color in. You have to teach them just as you would teach your own. So if you're going to be culturally diverse physically, you gotta be culturally diverse educationally and mentally."

Ethnic and Cultural Diversity of Students and Faculty

A pattern that I observed in the interviews was a notable difference between African American students and the other groups regarding the importance of student and faculty diversity at St. Peter Claver. All of the African American students said the school was not diverse enough, especially as to numbers of African American students.

African American students talked about feeling isolated at the school. An African American freshman added this:

> [We need to] make St. Peter Claver a more diverse population, definitely. If you want a kind of racial equality, a racial friendliness, you've got to break this 50% White, 10% Asian, 5% Hispanic, 1% Black ratio. I mean, that just won't cut it. Then as long as there's those ratios, then you're going to get the whispering, you're going to get the talking. "Oh what are they doing here? They're not supposed to be here," or whatever.

All of the African American students indicated that the faculty diversity issue was a serious problem for the school. Many felt that they had no one to relate to since only one African American faculty member worked at the school. As one senior student said, "We only have one teacher, Mr. Johnston. After that we ain't going to have nobody to relate to."

Another African American student discussed the need for more minority faculty members as role models, a common theme among the African American and some Latino students:

> It definitely matters because . . . we have one Black person on the staff right now; if we didn't have that one, then our experience would be totally different. I mean, because you need somebody especially, I mean, if you need peers in a place like St. Peter Claver you definitely need roles models. And you would definitely [need] somebody who's gone through the things—not just going with you—but gone through the things that you've gone through or are going through, and have experienced—not a detached but an older, wiser, you know, outlook on it. They've done it, they know what it's like and they can help you, I mean, you need that, definitely.

Several African American students suggested an educational purpose for faculty diversity that was important for the rest of the student body. One junior student said, "I think if there were Asian teachers and Latino teachers and African American teachers, I think it would help St. Peter Claver students not to be so close-minded." Another senior maintained:

> I think also in terms of the students and in terms of their exposure. I think that minority teachers . . . are going to give a perspective that the average White, male, St. Peter Claver student isn't going to get; and I think that's important . . . because there's not a diversity of thought as far as what we're given or the people who give it to us. I mean, they take all this knowledge and they filter it through themselves and then they dish it out to us. And once it goes through that filter, which is again usually White and male, then it [is passed] onto White male [students] again. . . . It gets very narrow, and I think that [more] women

> on the faculty and [more] minorities [on the faculty] would make a huge difference especially in the liberal arts.

Ethnic and Cultural Clubs

The school presently has eight clubs that emphasize ethnicity or culture. The data indicate that the African American Student Union (AASU) plays a significant role in the lives of the African American students. The data reveal that backlash from the faculty and students is occurring.

Background and Development Over Time

The African American group began during the 1985-1986 school year, although it was called the Black Student Union (BSU) until 1992. The group began when the parents of an African American student at St. Peter Claver initiated a barbecue for the African American students and their families. At that meeting they discussed the difficulties in attending St. Peter Claver and decided that the students would meet weekly as a club and the parents would meet monthly as a support group, practices that continue. The group had 26 members in 1993-1994, out of 28 total African American students (1993, school enrollment summary).

Support and Educational Purposes of Ethnic and Cultural Clubs

The data indicate that the two main purposes of the ethnic and cultural clubs are to provide support for ethnic minority students and to provide education for both the ethnic minority students and the entire school.

The interview data reveal that support was a major reason students gave for the purpose of the ethnic clubs. This was underscored by African American students. The African American students consistently talked about being the most obvious minority in the school, about the lack

of African American students in the school, and the need to band together to support one another. During the 1994-1995 school year, the AASU membership included 30 of the 33 African Americans in the school.[3] One junior African American student described the purpose in this way:

> The main goal is to keep the Black students who are already in the school to stay in. We want them to feel comfortable because there aren't that many. Before the club, the Black students that did come here, many of them left. That was one of the main objectives.

Another senior student talked about the AASU in terms of security:

> I mean AASU is like that security here. It was a security. It was like somewhere you could go when you had a problem. If you're being discriminated against, you can go to a meeting, call an emergency meeting and like, "Man, you know what happened?" This and that. You can get it out instead of having it balled up all in you all day or all week until the next meeting or until forever if you didn't have it. You know what I'm saying? Until having it balled up in you.

The one African American faculty member in the school who moderated the AASU also discussed the purpose of the club in terms of security for the African American students:

> [The AASU is] a place where guys garnish support one for another, just a social support group. A place where they could come together and have, if you will, a safe haven. I'm reminded of my son's rabbit, that when my son's rabbit is outside in the backyard, he's always on alert. We let him basically run free. He's always on alert for cats in the neighborhood and he's always looking left to right, but when we let him come into the garage, and the garage is locked, there's a sense of ease. He doesn't always have to be on alert. So, creating a social safe haven support group for the kids was one objective. . . . Kind of like the rabbit, I think the majority of African American students here feel like they're on guard most of the time when they're walking around the community.

Besides the social and affective support described above, a further purpose for the AASU was to provide academic support to African American students. This was mentioned by all of the

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[3]Two African American students withdrew from the school during the 1994-1995 year. The total number of African American students as of January 1995 was 33.

students and the moderator in the interviews. As the moderator said, "[another goal] was to create an academic support network for the students, whereby we would call upon upperclassmen who have had academic success in particular areas to help tutor and support and encourage underclassmen."

The African American students articulated these goals at their annual retreat and formed committees to plan appropriate activities. They sponsored many events for Black History Month highlighting contributions of African Americans, sponsored a Black theater group on campus, and brought in speakers from local universities and the community. They cosponsored a school liturgy for Black History Month and met with the English department to discuss the numbers of Black authors in the curriculum. They try to educate the St. Peter Claver community, including the faculty, about the importance of cultural diversity, and envision one purpose of the group is to augment the existing curriculum. Such as one African American senior said:

> I think there were two chapters from our world history book about Africa and I think we skipped them both. I think it says a lot when European history is three-quarters or four-fifths of what we studied, and that is one of the reasons we need an African American Student Union; just to try and balance that out.

The Backlash by White Students and Faculty

A pattern I noticed in the interviews was a concern from many White faculty and students that the ethnic and cultural clubs were divisive and separatist. The faculty who discussed this questioned whether the purpose of the clubs was congruent with the school's philosophy and purpose. The White students who discussed this felt excluded and wanted ethnic and cultural clubs of their own. It appears a backlash existed against the ethnic and cultural clubs on campus. One White student commented on this:

> My friends and I wanted to form a European group, but we were told no because it would be racist. I don't see the difference. . . . They won't let us have a White club because that's racist but they can have an African American club and a Filipino club.

Many faculty question the need for ethnic and cultural-based clubs. For example, one teacher said:

> [The way I see it] is that all differences stop at the door of the school. No matter where you are, you know.
> . . . Sometimes I have a hard time with clubs, you know, that are essentially exclusive. I mean we have the Black Students Society, or whatever it's called. . . . when I say that, you know, people tell me "Oh, yes, but there is one White kid in it." I don't know. I am wondering if it is reverse tokenism, you know? Why would you want to associate with people with whom you have really not much in common. . . . I mean they do have a lot in common, like on the school ground. They can be on the same team or in the same church club or something like that, but it seems to me that the clubs, ethnic clubs, would have a tendency to emphasize the differences rather than what they have in common.

Another concern of some faculty is that the ethnic and cultural clubs do not have clear direction or much substance. They criticize the clubs as not being significant or lacking a rigorous academic purpose that would befit a college preparatory school. One teacher, for example, said, "I don't see the groups . . . doing anything really to raise consciousness or cultural awareness. I think they just kind of come together and meet and get a T-shirt and I just don't see them as having much substance."

Racism/Prejudice

The existence of racism and prejudice at St. Peter Claver emerged as a common theme in the interview data and there were discernable differences in the way ethnic and culturally diverse groups perceived this issue. As with other findings in this setting, the African American students recounted more experiences of racism and prejudice than the other students, and the White students tended to say that racism did not exist in the school.

All 13 of the African American students in the interview sample discussed racism and prejudice and said it was a serious problem for the school. One African American first-year student said that other students were surprised when he earned good grades and made comments because he is Black. Another student said that White students told him that he smells. One varsity athlete talked about the perception many White parents had that the only reason he was admitted to the school was because of athletics. Other students talked about racist remarks that they overheard or the racist graffiti that was discovered in the bathroom. Most of the African American students cited the way their classmates responded to *Huck Finn* as an example of the kind of racism they encounter. They said that several White students seemed to take delight in speaking aloud in class the racial slurs used in the book under the pretense of quoting the author.

One African American student discussed his experience of racism at the school:

> (Student) A few of my coaches, they [are] racist but they try not to be; but you can tell they are though. Like, he'll [a coach] talk to me differently than he'll talk to somebody else and you can tell; so it's like, "Oh!" And then when the Rodney King thing happened, . . . some people . . . said all kinds of things when that happened. So it's like, that's when a lot of it [racism] came out right there, when the Rodney King incident happened.
>
> (Interviewer) What kinds of things happened? These are White students you're talking about?
>
> (Student) Teachers too.
>
> (Interviewer) Teachers too? What kinds of things would they say?
>
> (Student) They were saying stuff like, "He deserved it," and "he shouldn't," and "Anybody like that [like Rodney King] they should have got beat," and all this other stuff. So it's like, "Okay." Y'all don't understand that, 'cause you see, y'all can go places and y'all can go anywhere y'all want to, but we can't. We're like subject to always be searched and looked at and stuff.

Different Perceptions of How Other Students Experience Racism and Prejudice

In addition to the pattern described in the preceding section, a related pattern is the difference in the perceptions of how other students experience racism and prejudice. This was most apparent between African American and White students. One White student, for example, said, "A lot of my African American friends, they really haven't experienced anything like that [racism]. Definitely, I think they would say the same thing as I did [that racism doesn't exist at the school]. Just because I'm friends with them and that is an obvious thing right there." That same student went on to mention one African American student by name as a close friend who had never experienced racism. When that student was interviewed, however, he said otherwise. This pattern was repeated three times with different sets of students.

DISCUSSION

Community Experience: Why Are Some Students Left Out?

The research findings in this study raise interesting questions regarding the sociocultural context for learning, both for college preparatory and religious-based schools that claim a universal view of education, such as St. Peter Claver, and schools within the public domain that try to respond to the phenomenon of cultural diversity. Several studies (Bryk, Lee & Holland, 1993; Coleman & Hoffer, 1987; Coleman, Hoffer & Kilgore, 1982; Greeley, 1982) suggest that a major reason for differential achievement outcomes between public and private, religious-based schools is the unique ability of the later to formulate and sustain a functional community ethos. Greeley suggests that this difference affects for ethnic and cultural minority students more

profoundly. These studies suggest that one would find a strong communal atmosphere at a school like St. Peter Claver that permeated all ethnic and cultural groups.

Mismatch in Community Experience

The data indicate that the school purposefully seeks to create community with students and faculty at the school and it is a major characteristic in the way the school understands itself and promotes itself to potential students. However, excluding their experience in the club, African American Students expressed difficulty connecting with school community. That these students are members of the school community yet do not feel included in the community is a reason for great concern to a school with a specific religious purpose and philosophy such as St. Peter Claver, especially when these students feel the school is unaware of this phenomenon.

One component in the different experiences of community is explained by cultural mismatch (Martin, 1990a; Sue & Padella, 1986). Discontinuities exist between the home community and the school community, and these differences are so great that many students are not able to overcome them and connect with the school. The interview data support this contention on many accounts. The African American and interview participants were particularly vocal about this. Many said that though the school was trying to make changes and respond to cultural diversity, it was not working successfully because the school was not doing the right things. Other than the AASU, this group of students did not feel there was a place for them in the school community. They also pointed out that school officials and teachers were not asking them for their perspective. Nieto (1992, 1994) maintains that student perspectives are generally missing in discussions on educational practices. This illustrates not only the existence of cultural

mismatch for some students but the lack of awareness by the school as an institution to this occurrence.

I found a pattern in interviewing African American students that illustrates this point. The overwhelming expression was that they were extremely appreciative of having a chance to talk about issues that meant a great deal to them, but about which they had not previously been asked. Many of the African American students sincerely wished that the school could change to become more sensitive to the needs of African American students. As one senior said, "I mean, we're [African American students] St. Peter Claver. We're just as much St. Peter Claver as the White man. We want this to be our place too."

Importance of Ethnicity for Ethnic and Cultural Minority Students

The findings powerfully indicate that ethnicity is an important social construct for ethnic and cultural minority students at St. Peter Claver. Some discussion about ethnicity, ethnic groupings, ethnic differences or ethnic frame of reference emerged in every interview with these participants. It appears, however, that the ethnic and minority students engage their ethnic and cultural backgrounds in a constructivist fashion to augment the school curriculum and to facilitate learning. The ethnic and minority students structure their learning through culture but the school may be unaware of this phenomenon. From the ethnic and cultural minority students' perspective, it appears that although the faculty and administrators at St. Peter Claver seem to encourage ethnic and cultural diversity they do not completely understand the nuances involved for the school culture. Many faculty and White students do not seem to understand the energy with which minority students address the issues of ethnicity, multiculturalism, racism, prejudice, and diversity in the curriculum.

From the perspective of minority students it appears that St. Peter Claver is pleased to have cultural diversity as long as ethnic and cultural minority students can "fit into" the existing school culture. The data indicate, however, that this may not be happening for the African American students. The interviews indicate these students have a difficult time assimilating into, or are not interested in assimilating into, the dominant school culture.

Importance in School Curriculum

The second area where ethnicity is a powerful influence is in the school curriculum. In this area there was a consensus from the majority of minority students in all groups: the curriculum at St. Peter Claver does not adequately address their needs to learn about their ethnic and cultural backgrounds. This may be another area where school officials are unaware of the needs of their students. As one senior African American student, commenting on the lack of diversity in the curriculum and the lack of awareness by the school that this was even an issue, noted:

> If they [the teachers and school administrators] weren't professing so much that we're a culturally diverse community and welcome all cultures, I wouldn't trip. But since they say, "Oh, we're a culturally diverse this and that," you can't just let color in. You have to teach them just as you would teach your own. So if you're going to be culturally diverse physically, you gotta be culturally diverse educationally and mentally.

From a multicultural education perspective, however, the curriculum could be criticized as narrow and not inclusive of multiple perspectives. This is a challenge that any school advocating a universal approach to learning must address, and it does not appear to be adequately addressed at St. Peter Claver. Since they have a need to learn about their ethnic and cultural heritage, and since the curriculum does not adequately respond to this need, the ethnic clubs act as an extension of the curriculum to "fill in the gaps" for these students. The clubs serve as part

of the hidden curriculum to provide a type of knowledge that the students deem essential. This is done in an informal manner, through retreats, weekly meetings, religious and cultural rituals, plays, and outside school activities.

Ethnic and Cultural Clubs: Building Community, Constructing Learning and Connecting with the Home Community

Perhaps the most significant finding in this study is the phenomenon of ethnic and cultural clubs, the role they play in the setting, and the different meaning given to them by different groups. From the perspective of ethnic and cultural minority students, the clubs allow them to experience community, engage in active learning about their own culture, and connect their school experience with their home community. From the perspective of many White students and faculty, the clubs are divisive and separatist. The data indicate that ethnic and cultural clubs are generally misunderstood by this group of White students and faculty, and their evaluation of these clubs is characterized by the inability to understand what it is like to be a minority student. As the moderator of one ethnic club noted, "I don't think the White kids understand the ethnic clubs or their role on campus. I don't think they understand what it is to be in a minority position. They can't perceive what is going on."

From the perspective of the ethnic minority students, it appears that there is a "both/and" reality to the clubs in terms of contributing to the school community. The clubs do provide a place for the ethnic minority students who have the need of connecting with their own ethnic group. This is especially significant for the African American population, which is less than 3% of the population. The clubs also help to connect these students to the larger community, even if often with an ethnic frame of reference. Unfortunately, this nuance is not well understood by

many White faculty and students, who see the school community as "color blind" and "ethnically neutral." The problem with this stance, however, is that it denies the importance of culture and ethnicity, and generally results in the dominant cultural group's values being forced on subordinate groups (Martin, 1996a, 1996b). Such an attitude also seems in conflict with the school's philosophy and purpose.

CONCLUSION

Although from the outside St Peter Claver looks like a "model" school in terms of traditional educational measures, the question this study raises is at what price to the students? The school is based upon a religious tradition that claims to be inclusive and communal. However, as the data in this study indicate, the African American students do not feel included in the school community. That this occurs should be of great concern to the school administration, not only because it affects the educational experience of the African American students, but because it affects *all* students.

Assimilation is a high price to pay for academic success. The majority of the African American students agreed with one respondent who said that to succeed in the school, a student of color must "learn to act White." One wonders what the long-term consequences might be on these students in terms of their self esteem and future achievement. In formulating a "model school" that seeks to create a high achieving, college preparatory, culturally diverse environment, school officials must consider aspects other than strictly academic ones, such as sociocultural factors that influence the learning process. Otherwise, as this study suggests, there is the danger that some students will not be well served by the school.

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